

SOUTHWEST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER
SECOND QUARTER REPORT-FY 2001
For the period January 1, 2001 through March 31, 2001

SUBMITTED BY: John Hunter, Director, Fisheries Resources Division

Title of Accomplishment or Milestone: Produce report on the 2000 U.S. purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in the central-western Pacific for the South Pacific Regional Tuna Treaty Consultation.

Background Information: The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT) manager, annually convenes a meeting of parties to the Treaty. Meetings have been conducted since the start of the SPTT in 1988. Attendees usually include representatives of the 16 Island nations, the FFA staff, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) representative (the SPC is the scientific consultant of the FFA), and the U.S. (usually consists of a NMFS science representative, a State Department representative and members of the tuna fishing constituency). Discussions focus on operational aspects of the SPTT such as the number of licenses, closed areas or reporting, observer placements, statistics collection, etc. The NMFS provides a summary of the past year's fishing and an assessment of the stock status to date.

Purpose of Activity: To summarize 2000 central-western Pacific U.S. purse seine fisheries statistics.

Description of Accomplishment and Significant Results: NMFS produced and presented a paper entitled, "The 2000 U.S. tropical tuna purse seine fishery in the central-western Pacific." Thirty-three U.S. purse seiners fished in the central-western Pacific in 2000. Logbooks and landings data were collected from 100% of the fleet, length measurements were taken of approximately 64,700 fish and species composition samples from 31,100 fish. The 2000 U.S. tropical tuna catch (yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye tunas) decreased to the lowest levels since 1988 (125,000 t). Much of the fleet was forced to stop fishing in May, June, November and December 2000. Vessels remained in port in an effort to decrease supplies of light meat tuna as cannery prices for small tunas (<7.5 lb) dropped to record low levels in 2000. In order to compensate for lost revenue, the fleet also concentrated more on schools of free-swimming tunas and less on schools associated with Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs). Free-swimming schools usually contain larger fish and higher proportions of yellowfin tuna, market categories that typically yield higher prices. However, sets on free-swimming schools are half as successful as sets on FADs, which weakened many of the fleet's performance indices. As a result, catch rates decreased from 34 t/day fished in 1999 to 27 t/day fished in 2000, and average trip lengths increased from 42 days at-sea in 1999 to 56 days at-sea in 2000.

Significance of Accomplishment: The paper and participation by NMFS continues monitoring of a valuable U.S. fishery and its associated stocks, supports the constituency and maintains the mission of NMFS in building sustainable fisheries.

Problems: None.

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